

# A Journal From Africa

Stories from my year in college at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, West Africa in 1982, and my journey home there after 24 years.

## ABOUT ME



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## The Nananom Nsamanfo Are Our Ancestors



One of the reasons why I came to the conclusion that the Baha'i Faith was what I had been searching for was the concept of Progressive Revelation.

What this means is that God being the Supreme

Being, is unknowable to us. In order to educate us about our spiritual reality, He sends educators who teach us about who we are and how we relate to each other. As mankind has progressed, we have been able to grasp increasingly complex concepts, including life after death, the soul and our purpose for being here on earth. In one Baha'i prayer, it is said "I bear witness, oh my God that thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee." We are given guidance through these teachers - or Manifestations - sent by God to mankind about every 1,000 years and our responsibility is to grasp these teachings. In Judeo-Christian religious history, these Manifestations are known as Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ. Just as we learned as children in school, each class level brought more complex studies. So is it with each Manifestation, each bringing more complex information about our spiritual nature than the previous Manifestation. This is because at the time each appeared on earth, mankind had in his development was ready for the new teachings. Additionally, we believe that in the written history of religion there were other Manifestations such as Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha and Muhammad, all voice pieces for the unknowable God.

Baha'is also believe that the latest Manifestation who also fulfills the promises of every religion in the past has appeared and brought new teachings to unite mankind. His name is Baha'u'llah and he lived during the 1800's, persecuted for teaching about the oneness of mankind, the oneness of religion - Progressive Revelation as I described above, the equality of men and women, the harmony between science/reason and religion, the establishment of world peace, compulsory education for all children on earth, harmony among all races and respect for all diverse cultures. For teaching this, He was imprisoned, persecuted, expelled from his country and lived a life in prison.

## MY JOURNAL ENTRIES BY DATE

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Now, what happened in Africa and other parts of the world without recorded histories? Remember my discussion about the linguist in the villages? Oral tradition is sacred in all African cultures, so there is a recorded history but just not written down. The eloquence of the spoken word is revered, and the linguist and the elder women are entrusted with helping to keep the history of generations upon generations of the people.

As an example, in 1982 I came across an American woman who came to Ghana with her family Bible. It had the name *Dadzie* (a Fante name) and the descendants of that name in America, as well as the name of a family village northeast of Cape Coast in Ghana. Her family had been sold into slavery at the Cape Coast Castle, and her American ancestors had carefully kept these two pieces of information hidden for safe keeping.

The elder women in the villages memorize the family genealogy histories, carefully keeping track of each generation of the family - every name, every marriage, every child's birth and every story. This American woman found the family village and was able to make the connection when the family was captured and taken away by comparing the information she had with the memorized genealogical history kept by the elders in the village. She resembled many of the family members and was welcomed back into the family. She flew back to Virginia, packed up her two boys, and moved to Ghana where she lives with her family today.

While I was a student at KNUST, I studied the complexity of the traditional religion among the Akan peoples. I came to the conclusion that it would be foolish to believe that the continent of Africa had not been blessed with Manifestations of its own. Their traditional beliefs must have come from Manifestations of God, just the same way that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism came to the rest of the world. There is no way that man could have formed these complex societies or value systems. There is no way that man could have perfected a moral code to live by that has survived for thousands of years, based on honesty, forbearance, humility, peace and faith.

The traditional religion is so complex that it is divided into a hierarchy in order to describe the attributes of God and God's relationship to man. At the highest level there is the Supreme Being - one God just like what we westerners believe in. The Akan see everything in terms of balance, and describe God as being both *Nyame* or the Great God Father and *Nyamewaa* the Great Goddess Mother. These are aspects of God not to be mistaken as deities.

Below that, there is the *Abosom*, labeled by westerners as being "lesser gods." But on closer examination, they are allegories for the various attributes of God - and I think they may have been Manifestations, since each has a spiritual teaching that is attached to their histories. There are many, such as:

- Nana Akonedi whose shrine is at Larteh Sublease. She hands out justice and gives the final decision in all societal disputes such as those related to the chieftancy, property and family disputes.
- Nana Asuo Gyebi who is a protector and a great healer.
- Nana Esi Ketewaa who is an ancestor who died while giving birth. She is a Fante who protects children and women during childbirth. She states that we are all her children.
- Nana Adade Kofi who stands for strength. His sword is used to swear oaths of allegiance.
- Tano, several gods who come from the Tano river. They are healers

of spiritual, mental and physical illnesses.

- Nana Obo Kwesi, another Fante. He is a healer and works to fight those that do evil.

Under the *Abosom* are the *Nananom Nsamanfo*. They are our Ancestors who were people who had lived honorable lives, and because of their contribution to society they are given the station of Ancestor in the next world after the body dies and the soul passes on to being one step closer to the Creator.

Baha'is believe in the exact same concept. Part of our reality is our soul. It is indestructible and is separate from the physical body. We believe that the soul travels on to the next world of God after this one, leaving the physical body behind when we die. Here's a passage from the Baha'i Writings that I particularly treasure:

*"And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station. The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. Such a soul liveth and moveth in accordance with the Will of its Creator, and entereth the all-highest Paradise. The Maids of Heaven, inmates of the loftiest mansions, will circle around it, and the Prophets of God and His chosen ones will seek its companionship. With them that soul will freely converse, and will recount unto them that which it hath been made to endure in the path of God, the Lord of all worlds. If any man be told that which hath been ordained for such a soul in the worlds of God, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, his whole being will instantly blaze out in his great longing to attain that most exalted, that sanctified and resplendent station." -- Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 155*

We believe that the souls of all of our loved ones who have passed on from this world will be there in the next world, ready to receive us. It is a better place than this one, free of pain and anguish. Our station in that world will be dependent on what we accomplish through good deeds in this world. We also believe that the souls who have passed on watch out for us, and have the capability to intercede on our behalf to assist us with our prayers. I often ask my grandmother who has passed on to help out when I'm praying to get through difficulty.

We don't believe in the concept of physical hell, as this was an allegory told to mankind during mankind's infancy - as one would tell a story to a child in order to understand a complex concept. Hell is a state of being, not a place.

The next part of this story requires an open mind. Believe me, I'm not the "hocus-pocus" kind of person. I'm sharing these experiences and ultimately I have no explanation for them.

The day my grandmother passed away when I was young, I was at home waiting for the phone call. Her death was inevitable because she had had a severe heart attack and would not recover. She asked that my brothers and I not stay at the hospital. I remember standing in the shower, and a feeling overcame

me that I knew she was in the room with me. It was that same familiarity when we walk into an old friend's or family member's home, and we can feel their familiar presence. I had been asking God what I was going to do without her, because she was always the one who looked out for me. Right then, I felt what I can only describe as my grandmother's soul passing through me, and I felt pressure in my right hand like her hand grabbing mine. Then I heard inside my head, "Baby, it's going to be alright. It's going to be just fine, don't you worry. I will always be here when you need me, never far away."

I've found that these kinds of events are actually common, having spoken to many people who've said they've also had dreams of loved ones who have passed on, but the dreams are so vivid that they could swear their loved one was there with them.

Uncle Prince had explained to me that the Fante belief that the Ancestors watch out for us to keep balance in our lives. They are there in the next world to protect us, to keep us safe from harm and to guide us on the right path. It amazes me that people will dismiss the traditional beliefs of Africa because they are simply not familiar with them. If they were to look with an open mind and an open heart, they would find incredible commonality with their own beliefs.

I had mentioned that Nana had visited me in a dream. It wasn't an isolated event. He continued to visit me many times. My feelings associated with these dreams were conflicting because as much as it was great to be with this friend of mine as the years have gone by and my life in Ghana becomes more and more dear to me, my sense of guilt for having let Nana down also magnified.

I spoke to a wonderful woman named Julie Walker about all of this. Julie is a unique and gifted person. She calls herself an intuitive, and she is incredibly sensitive to all things spiritual. At first I was apprehensive, but having spent time with Julie on more than one occasion, I became open to her advice. I shared with her what had been happening with these dreams, and she told me that I was not recognizing two things. One, Nana had already forgiven me; and two, Nana was also laying down the pathway for me to ask for forgiveness and for him to acknowledge it. So she told me that when I got home that night to change all my bedding, take a shower and be spotlessly clean, wear clean sleeping clothes to bed, and in my prayers I was to not only ask Nana to come visit me, but also ask for his forgiveness and give me an irrefutable sign that he had understood and accepted my apology.

I did just that, and I fell hard asleep that night. Then I dreamed that I was standing at the opening to a huge train tunnel carved into the side of a mountain on the coast, above a cliff with waves crashing against the rocks below. I stood there knowing I was supposed to wait for something to happen. Then the tunnel started to become dimly lit, and then steadily brighter. The light got so strong that it was as bright as the sun, but it was a silvery white color and it didn't hurt to look at it. It radiated like a star and it was beautiful. In the center of the light, Nana walked out and stood in front of me. I recall that we talked, but I couldn't hear what was being said. He was happy - it was the joy that comes from being at peace. He smiled, and I felt that everything was going to be alright. And then I woke up.

Normally, I am the kind of person who struggles to wake up from sleep. Don't talk to me, don't look at me, just let me wake up in my own time. But this time, I was effortlessly wide awake and I sat straight up in bed. It was dark, but I felt like I had had a full night's sleep and I was supposed to be getting up. I turned to check my iPhone docking station to check the time on the phone. It wasn't 2:51AM. It wasn't 3:04AM. It was exactly 3:00AM. And on the cover of the phone

was a text message. It was from Akwasi Osei. *"Yaw, good morning. Hope all is well. Greetings and love."*

Akwasi Osei is old school. He never text messages me. I sat there staring at the phone, trying to figure out why on earth out of nowhere he would send this text at this time. Then it hit me. An irrefutable sign. We were known in Ghana as The Three Musketeers or The Three. Nana had let me know all was forgiven, but I think he was also telling me that he's doing alright and that I have a responsibility to now take care of my brother Awasi Osei because Nana has passed on and Akwasi and I are still here in this world.

Akwasi and I are part of The Three. The Three are still together and always will be. Imagine that. Nana and I both fell off our paths in life. We lost focus. Who can say that they have a friend who would move heaven and earth to help save our lives? I know I can say that.

The Ancestors are revered and feared among the Akan, but they are also dearly loved and cherished. They protect us, they change the course of life to bring us back to happiness. They work to put balance in our lives so that we are at peace. Nana is part of my Ancestors now and my life is so blessed because of it. I have a home in Ghana. I have my Fante people who give me strength and guide me through life. I have more love than most people can only hope for. And I have my two sons that the Ancestors have blessed me with.

The *Nananom Nsamanfo* are our Ancestors.

Posted by Dennis Hunter at 10:05 AM

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